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Van Name, M. I.

The devil

[Philadelphia]

[c1923]

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The Devil

By
M. I. Van Name

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THE DEVIL on the high mountain waved his arms in every direction and promised the Son of Man everything if only He would become a follower. It didn't make any difference to the devil whether he could deliver the goods or not—**HE WANTED FOLLOWERS.**

FROM a soap box platform, in a hired hall or in a loaned parlor, or almost any other place, you can listen to an orator making glib promises — promises in return for followers.

The speech-makers damn capital, capitalists and capitalism and would have us believe that everything is wrong and capitalism is to blame.

History records a good many cases where a perfectly harmless word, and sometimes a very respectable and useful word, has been made over, by incorrect or deliberate usage, into an epithet that the unthinking have regarded as an almost perfect insult; and the same sort of thing seems to be happening to the words capital and capitalism right now.

It has come to be that when one man calls another a "Capitalist," he usually intends to label the other with a hard name; and in some cases the

man so labeled feels that way about it, too, and you may see him, sometimes, attempting to disprove the charge.

Now, just what ARE the facts about this situation?

The facts are that when one man, great or small, calls another man, small or great, a capitalist, with intent to single him out as different from the rest of mankind, it is just as though the sparrow railed against the peacock for having feathers!

It may seem to the sparrow that the peacock's feathers are more for show than for service; and the sparrow has the right, if he wants to be so unkind, to voice this aspect of the situation if he thinks it will do any good. But the thing that the sparrow—or eagle, or the ostrich, or the nightingale—ought not to forget is that regardless of their size or color or function FEATHERS COVER ALL BIRDS.

When a man starts out to damn

capitalism and everything connected with it, he ought to be sure that he has no connection with it, nor any interest in it, himself.

The very least he can do is to seek out and find the answers to the following questions:

What is capital?

What is capitalism?

Who are the capitalists?

Am I one?

WHAT IS CAPITAL?

Let us quote here from the story of "How Bill Got Ahead."

"Ever since Bill had heard capital described as 'yesterday's surplus' the word had taken on a new meaning.

He knew his savings in the bank represented capital — also the money in his pocket.

The clothes he had on he decided

were a part of his capital because they were earned during his yesterdays.

His skill that he used on his job he decided was capital because he got that skill during his yesterdays. The knowledge he had stored up in his brain through reading and experience he decided was also capital—he had obtained it during the yesterdays.

Bill was strong for getting ahead. The more he thought, the more sure he was that the way to get ahead was by making every today have a hold-over of some surplus for tomorrow.

Bill was wise!

He saw that CAPITAL MEANT EVERYTHING EARNED OR PRODUCED THAT WASN'T USED UP ON THE SAME DAY IT WAS MADE. Bill didn't have to change his plans any.

He just understood them better—and better understanding means better progress.

Bill went ahead.”

Suppose we consider the case of a little old gray-bearded squatter, a man who has lived and worked alone far out in the wilderness for the last forty years. He has a little hut that his own hands have reared; a few necessary tools and utensils that he brought with him or has laboriously acquired; he has the clothes on his back; he lives off the land and its plenty. But he is, in a crude though effective way, a capitalist. The surplus of his yesterdays is there with him,—in his mind, knowledge; in his hut, his few belongings; around him, the unconsumed fruits of his toil.

But a fire sweeps through his country at night, and his hut, his few little comforts, and even his clothes, are

utterly destroyed. He faces the morning as did the first man; naked, hungry, cold.

About him is the air he breathes, the berries he may eat, the sticks he may rub together to make a fire, if he knows how,—all about him is still the capital the Creator furnishes to mankind, UNCONVERTED CAPITAL, the surplus of the yesterdays since the world began. It is there for him to convert to his own uses as much and as well as he can,—but do you envy him? Would you say that the fire that ruined him was good for him, or for anyone else? Did it do you any good? Wouldn't you have helped the old fellow put it out if you had been there? Is his loss a gain for anyone else, or does it represent an actual loss from the sum total of mankind's accumulations?

Any sane man knows how to answer these questions.

Eight

What has just been described was the destruction of capital in an elementary form. Even weak-minded people would not approve it. The old man may have been queer and crabbed and mean and even disreputable, but no one can find logic or satisfaction in what happened to his capital.

Yet the men who rail against capital as an evil thing to be done away with get followers who somehow make themselves believe that capital means something objectionable and injurious to the common weal,—something that should be destroyed!

WHAT IS CAPITALISM?

Capitalism describes a certain form of organized society that assures REWARD IN CONFORMITY WITH SERVICE. It is the system upon which society functions with the most highly civilized peoples of all countries today.

Nine

Capitalism is not an accident. Since the earliest beginnings of history mankind has been striving to develop increasingly better rules of conduct between men. What we are doing now is simply using the lessons of the past for today's guidance.

Capitalism is the product of the upward progress of mankind. It functions for you and me and the other fellow in such a way that each of us receives, proportionately, a reward for his work that is based on the valuation the rest of mankind has placed upon the particular kind of service he renders. And don't overlook the fact that capitalism not only makes it possible for us to COLLECT that reward but also sees to it that we get the FULL reward, and not just a fraction of it.

Capitalism retains for each of us the surplus which our yesterdays have accumulated. It has rewarded them according to our industry or our laziness

—mental or physical—and the surplus, the unconsumed reward is our own.

Who was it said, "He who would be greatest among you shall be the servant of all"?

Reward proportioned to service! This is the great fundamental of this cursed capitalism we hear so much about!

WHO ARE THE CAPITALISTS?

The great—oh, the GREAT majority of them—are just ordinary people, who live in ordinary or humble surroundings, and who eat and sleep and work and play at just ordinary everyday things. They are the great common people of this great country. They are day laborers and desk workers, skilled mechanics and clerks, chauffeurs and firemen and salesmen and plasterers; men and women, everywhere. They may eat from a dinner pail, or they

may eat lunch at the club and wear spats; but, in any event, if they are using what was "produced and not consumed on the same day it was made" they are capitalists; and let the callers of hard names make the most of it!

AM I A CAPITALIST?

Of course, you are! That is the whole point. ALL OF US ARE!

Some of us have more capital than others, and, by the same token, some of us have less! That will always be so as long as some are industrious, some are disinclined to industry, and some are just plain lazy. Some of us have more ability than others, some have less. Some would rather do one thing, and some another; some of us persist in trying to perform a certain task whether we are fitted to do it or not; but mankind has determined the

reward for what we do, just as we ourselves are responsible for the proportion of the reward we claim by virtue of how well and how hard we do it. But we are ALL capitalists; no one can go loose on the streets who isn't.

Unfortunately, the word capitalist works very well as an epithet. People hurl it at each other with the implication that it means UNFAIR. Some who do this know better, but they probably do not realize that they are putting into the minds of a growing number of thoughtless people an unfounded and illogical prejudice against capitalism.

Individual capitalists may be unfair, of course. You can always find all kinds of people. But the capitalists who are unfair are not necessarily those who have the most capital, any more than they are necessarily those who have the least. There are probably all kinds and all sizes of unfair

capitalists—but they would be just like that if they had not a single belonging. Capitalism doesn't make them that way: in fact, it does more to hold unfairness in check than any system the human mind has yet devised.

Capitalism is one of the most advanced products of the progress of mankind. It is a system of society wherein humans have the maximum opportunity of WORKING TOGETHER for mutual profit to do things they could not possibly do working separately; and of dividing the GREATER REWARDS thus produced in conformity with the service rendered.

The most important and valuable inheritance we have received from all yesterdays is the capitalistic system.

Destroy that system and you destroy civilization.

When someone waves his arms in all directions and tells us everything good will be ours for the asking if

we will only follow him and destroy "Capitalism," shall we follow—or will we first demand facts through these questions?

What is capital?

What is capitalism?

Who are the capitalists?

Am I one?

* * *

The trouble with Jack Smith and Tony Pasquale and you and me and the other fellow is that when we are taken to the top of the mountain and promised everything if we'll only become followers we don't tell the glib promiser to step back, and then simply take a GOOD SQUARE LOOK FOR OURSELVES.



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